

2-1974

## The National News Council's News Clippings, 1974 February

The National News Council, Inc.

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FEB 1 1974 *Signature*



**public  
editor**

**cy liberman**

What the local newspaper ombudsmen (all 12 of us in this country) are trying to do in dealing with complaints about performance of individual newspapers, the National News Council is trying to do in dealing with complaints about the national media — not only the national newspapers, but all national suppliers of news, including the broadcasting networks. In my view the council, an independent, private agency, supplements our work and has the same general goals — helping to improve the performance of the media and to enhance the credibility of the media.

The National News Council started operating in August and has handled many grievances, none of which has been a dramatic case or one that required a public hearing. It tried to serve the public in a very important case by offering to review and analyze serious charges against television network newscasts, and it reported the other day that it has been unable to do so. The council has been frustrated in handling what could have been the most significant case of its first year because the President of the United States, who made general charges against the newscasters, has refused so far to support those charges with specific details.

On Oct. 26 at a news conference in Washington devoted mainly to a discussion of events related to the Watergate break-in, the President referred to network newscasts. He said, "I have never heard or seen such outrageous, vicious, distorted reporting in 27 years of public life." He also said: "But when people are pounded night after night with that kind of frantic, hysterical reporting, it naturally shakes their confidence."

The President did not specify then, and has declined to specify since, what he considered to be outrageous, vicious or distorted, or to give any example of what he thought was frantic or hysterical reporting. Broad charges, unsupported by specific evidence, may shake the confidence of some people in the target of the charges, but others, I think, will lower their confidence in the originator of such charges.

Well, the National News Council, set up to look into complaints of that kind, quickly set about trying to investigate by asking the President for the specific instances upon which he based his charges. The council could reasonably operate only by going to the source of the charges. It had tried to review newscasts without specifics, quite apart from the enormity of the task, it would have put itself in the position of being both prosecutor and judge.

From Oct. 30 until Jan. 23, the council tried to get from the White House information on specific newscasts — not general subjects — considered offensive. The staff sent two telegrams, made at least 15 telephone calls, and had three interviews at the White House. The result of all that was word that the White House did not have the time nor the staff to list the specifics. The council finally issued a report this week giving details of this sad, frustrating experience.

Using more restraint than I would have, the council ended its 15-page report by saying: "We believe it is seriously detrimental to the public interest for the President to leave his harsh criticisms of the television networks unsupported by specific details that could then be evaluated objectively by an impartial body." I would say it is appalling that a high public official would utter sweeping charges that tend to undermine public confidence in a national institution and then fail to either support those charges with specific information or withdraw them. I don't know why The Morning News did not tell us readers about the council's report. Maybe the failure to get the specifics on which to make a determination resulted in what the editors considered was nonnews. Viewed from here, the council's frustration in this important case is frustration for all citizens.



# News Council's first case results in a 'no decision'

By Jeff Mill

The National News Council has failed to secure from the White House "specific instances" that would buttress President Nixon's charges of "outrageous, vicious, distorted" television network news reporting, and has deferred further action on the matter.

The News Council adopted a resolution at a January 28 New York meeting outlining its efforts to secure White House cooperation and the providing of specific details in support of the President's accusations.

The report concluded, "It would be difficult, if not futile, however, for the Council to attempt to deduce, from broad and non-specific charges, the particular actions of the television networks that inspired the President's remarks at his news conference on October 26, 1973."

## Case remains open

The Council indicated it would renew its investigation if it was supplied with a list of specific instances of objectionable reports by the White House.

The report concluded, "We believe it is seriously detrimental to the public interest for the President to leave his harsh criticism of the television networks unsupported by specific details that could then be evaluated objectively by an impartial body."

The report outlined the efforts that were made, first to contact the White House, and then to secure cooperation from it. The report indicated that the Council, and director William Arthur, had dispatched two telegrams, made "at least" 15 phone calls, and ultimately had conducted three interviews with Presidential Press Secretary Ronald L. Ziegler and deputy communications director Ken Clawson in an effort to secure a list of specifics.

The report explains that Arthur and associate director Ned Schnurman met with Ziegler for 25 minutes the afternoon of November 29. "At the outset, (they) reiterated their request for specifications of the President's charges against television networks."

## Cooperation promised

"Ziegler said that the White House would cooperate if the Council provided examples of what it wanted. He said that he preferred to see a broad-based study of the White House—media relationships and suggested that a time span beginning with the Cambodian intrusion to the present would make sense.

"He expressed a fear that a superficial, 'quickie' study of the record would result in a Council finding that the networks were simply doing their job and that they were really 'good boys.'"

"He (Ziegler) said that he firmly believes that certain elements of the media

are out to get the Nixon Administration."

At a meeting of the Council December 11 in Racine, Wisc., Arthur and Schnurman "reported that Ziegler and Clawson dwelled at some length in their interviews on six areas of television news reporting:

1. "Reporting on Hanoi's charges of Presidential tyranny during the bombing period beginning on December 18, 1972.
2. "Reporting in the early fall of 1973 on the President's personal finances.
3. "Accusations against the Administration of 'manufacturing' the mid-East alert to divert attention from Watergate
4. "The Cox interview (by CBS newsman Walter Cronkite) and other reporting about an alleged Presidential trust fund.
5. "Reporting on the ITT settlement, with alleged unfavorable references to the President.
6. "The preponderance of 'unfavorable' comments and interviews on network newscasts beginning on Monday evening, October 22, following the firing of Mr. Cox on October 20."

In a continuing effort to "obtain specific details of the President's charges," the Council obtained abstracts of network evening newscasts and commentaries from the Vanderbilt News Archives in Nashville, Tenn. "These were to be presented to Ziegler's office with a request that the White House designate specifically which newscasts were, in the opinion of the President, 'outrageous, vicious, and distorted.'"

"Requests for a meeting with Ziegler to present these abstracts were made by telephone to the White House on December 11, 14, 15, 19, 26 and 27."

On January 16, a meeting was arranged with Ziegler, now returned from California, for January 17, with Arthur and Schnurman.

"Arthur opened the conversation by stating that the Council was seeking again to obtain specifications of the President's charges. Ziegler reiterated his earlier assertion that the White House did not wish to get into any 'cooperative research venture' with the National News Council. Arthur again stated the Council did not wish to get involved in a 'cooperative research venture'; that it was, and still is, seeking only the specifications of the President's charges of 'outrageous, vicious, distorted' reporting by the networks.

Ziegler again stated that the White House did not have the time or the staff to prepare such a list.

Schnurman gave Ziegler a copy of the Vanderbilt abstracts of newscasts on subjects the Council had been able to identify as those Ziegler and other members of the President's staff asserted were unfairly presented on the networks. He was asked to identify from these abstracts television network newscasts that, in the opinion of

the President, were 'outrageous, vicious and distorted.'

Ziegler accepted the file of abstracts. He stated that he did not necessarily agree with some of the thoughts that other White House aides had on the subject of network coverage. He said, however, that he did not object to what he described as 'incomplete' reporting.

"At the conclusion of the meeting, Ziegler said that the abstracts would be studied and that his office would respond with an answer on how far if at all, it would go in providing the Council with the information it is seeking. He assured Arthur and Schnurman that an answer would be forthcoming before the next scheduled Council meeting, on January 28 in New York City.

"As of January 28," the report concludes, no such answer has been received."

The Council meets next on March 25.

## Ad bureau

(Continued from page 9)

region, seminars open to all bureau members in each area. Major co-op advertisers will participate in working sessions to get more sales for their company, their retailers and for newspapers.

Howard Grothe, ad director of the *Miami Herald*, said there were various major and minor complaints about the bureau's operation. Some ad directors were unhappy that the bureau's regional offices were devoted entirely to national advertisers and their agencies.

"Some commentators thought that bureau activities were too decentralized, while realizing the self-starting principle Jack Kauffman so strongly believes in," Grothe said.

There were also questions as to why the bureau always seemed to hire experts from the client side of the ad industry, rather than hiring experienced newspaper pros.

One thing very evident, Grothe continued, was that many bureau members have only a very sketchy idea of the enormous variety and depth of services which the bureau performs for the newspaper industry. A communications gap exists, and the bureau must find ways to tell its members more about what it does and how much it does.

It was suggested that bureau people coordinate travel plans in such a manner that they can make not only agency and advertiser calls while at the same time making themselves known to the local newspapers in these areas and visit them or make joint calls with them whenever possible.

## Hoffa series offered

James R. Hoffa, who studied prisons the hard way in Lewisburg Federal Penitentiary, has written a three-part series on life in prison and needed reforms. North American Newspaper Alliance is distributing the former Teamster president's series to subscribers and offering it for sale where available.

EDITOR & PUBLISHER for February 2, 1974



## ***Hit And Run***

After trying for three months to get the White House to support President Nixon's Oct. 26 charges that the television networks engaged in "outrageous, vicious, distorted reporting," the National News Council has still not been able to get the President's aids to put up or shut up. Zealous questioning by the staff of the National News Council finally brought out that Mr. Nixon's press assistants thought the President had been unfairly treated in six areas of reporting. But when the Council secured abstracts of network newscasts and commentaries in these areas and asked the White House to designate which ones were "outrageous, vicious or distorted," Presidential Press Secretary Ronald Ziegler failed to respond by the date he reportedly promised to have an answer.

The obvious conclusion to be drawn is that the White House is more interested in hit and run attacks that will intimidate the networks than in helping the privately endowed National News Council, by voluntary means, to carry out its function of correcting unfairness and inaccuracy in the national news media if it exists. It seems characteristic of Mr. Nixon's method of attacking his supposed enemies—and perhaps it was his intent—that his accusations got much more public attention than his failure to support them with evidence.

2/2/74



*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

The Cleveland Press

D. 375,653

FEB 8 1974

*By Julian Krawcheck*

# Leader here tells News Council goals

By JULIAN KRAWCHECK

The National News Council is "walking on eggshells" in trying to evolve a pattern of hearing public complaints against the news media and, if possible, resolving them.

These are the words of William B. Arthur, executive director of the council, who came here yesterday to address the Cleveland chapter of Sigma Delta Chi, national journalistic society, and tarried to discuss his hopes and frustrations with newsmen.

He is a past national president of SDX, and he was the last editor of Look Magazine.

Arthur said he had encountered skepticism from

some newspapers wary of surrendering their prerogatives to speak for themselves and from some elements of the public who feel the council will become an apologist for the press.

Neither fear is valid, the soft-spoken native of Kentucky said. He defined the aims of the council to be those of the British Press Council which he spelled out as follows:

"To preserve freedom of the press, to consider complaints about the conduct of the press and the conduct of persons and organizations toward the press, and to keep under scrutiny attempts to restrict access to information of public interest."

Arthur believes the free-

dom of the press in America has been imperiled by attacks from high government officials but feels the existence of the foundation, backed council might head

off sentiment for government controls.

He detailed how the council had reacted to the complaint of President Nixon, in a press conference last Oct. 26, that reporting by the TV networks on Watergate was "outrageous, vicious and distorted."

Arthur and his assistant, Ned Schnurman, made three trips to Washington to try to get the White House to single out specific newscasts that had angered the President, but they got no response.

This led to the council finding: "We believe it is seriously detrimental to the public interest for the President to leave harsh criticisms of the TV networks unsupported by specific de-

Complaints of news media policies may be addressed to the National News Council at 1 Lincoln Plaza, New York 10023.

tails that could be evaluated objectively by an impartial body."

That impartial body, Arthur said, is the National News Council, which is comprised of nine public members and six media members. The \$300,000 first-year budget was supplied by several foundations, chiefly the 20th Century Fund and the Markle Foundation.

Arthur stressed that the council has no authority to sit in legal judgment on the press but is hopeful that its findings will be influential in determining future news media policy.



William B. Arthur



lief: "But don't panic. It may take ten to 14 years before the bees hit the U.S." This rather anticlimactic tale could well be a metaphor for the paper that carries it in its first issue, appearing on newsstands this week. The tabloid weekly *National Star* is arriving with a loud promotional buzz, but there is not much editorial sting in sight.

With an opening press run of 1.5 million, to be distributed initially in the Northeast and parts of the Midwest, the *Star* represents a major invasion by Australian Publishing Baron Rupert Murdoch. Now 42, Murdoch inherited a small Australian daily from his father in 1953 and built it into a worldwide publishing empire: eleven magazines and more than 80 newspapers in Australia, New Zealand and Great Britain. Murdoch's major acquisitions include Britain's Peeping-Tom *Sunday News of the World* (circ. 6,000,000) and the London *Sun* (circ. 3,000,000), which was failing until he took it over in 1969 and applied his formula: cheese-cake, crime coverage and a prose style seemingly aimed at readers who move their lips.

The *Star* is a subdued version of its naughtier British sisters. Its models are more or less clothed and the focus is on entertainment, sports and advice ("Let us make you a star") rather than scandal. Its layout is in the British popular mold: narrow columns, small body type, terse stories, a welter of breathless headlines, jumbled boxes and graphics—all suggesting an earthquake in the composing room. Once they get past the frenetic format, American readers may feel let down by the torpor of *Star* stories. The best that the paper can offer on Watergate is a hearsay account of the forthcoming book by Washington *Post* reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein; the headline is ominous ("Another time bomb ticking away under the White House"), but the text offers no dynamite ("Insiders hint that Bernstein and Woodward make no new startling disclosures in their book").

In fact, the soft-spoken, impeccably tailored Murdoch is now far more interesting than the *Star* itself. He confidently expects to tap a huge audience that others are not reaching. He thinks that most major publications here are aimed "at the rich and the intellectual." "Daily newspapers are limited and local," he says, "and national magazines have to depend on advertising dollars and the opinions of Madison Avenue." He wants the *Star* to lean almost solely on circulation revenue provided by readers willing to pay a quarter at newsstands or supermarkets.

He dismisses the *National Enquirer*, a once scandalous tabloid now gone straight, as middle-aged: "It writes about old movie stars, UFOs, health—all legitimate subjects but not of great interest



PUBLISHER RUPERT MURDOCH  
Amid the buzzes, no sting.

to the young family audience we want." For all its faults, Vol. I, No. 1 of the *Star* is written with zest; many may find it the "good read" Murdoch wants it to be. The *Star's* first issues are being put out by a team of veterans from other Murdoch papers and a growing number of American recruits. Murdoch plans a full-time staff of 30, will hire an American editor after the shakedown period is over. He has launched a \$5,000,000 promotion campaign and hopes to begin national distribution within four months if things go well. Murdoch has confounded skeptics in the past, and the U.S. may indeed be vulnerable to foreign attack. As another *Star* story points out: "If all the Chinese jumped up and down in unison, the vibrations would cause a tidal wave that could engulf America."

## Short Takes

► *Christian Science Monitor* Correspondent Richard L. Strout, 75, picked up his first congressional-press-gallery membership card in 1923. He has covered every President from Harding to Nixon, reported on the Teapot Dome and Watergate hearings and, on the side, written the *New Republic's* weekly column, *TRB*. Last week Strout was without his gallery card for the first time in 51 years. It was not renewed because he had refused to comply with a new rule handed down by the gallery's five-man governing board. To retain their accreditation, reporters must now promise not to accept fees for moonlighting promotional or advertising chores they may do, "including payment for appearances on radio or television programs spon-

sored by any members of Congress or the Federal Government."

Strout, who has appeared as a moderator (at \$75 a clip) on Voice of America broadcasts, told the board that he has no intention of abandoning radio: "I said that I thought the VOA was a pretty good thing. I told them that in my judgment, often fallible, they were making a mistake." The board did not agree. In response to the atmosphere created by Watergate, the rule was laid down to keep congressional reporters from being (or seeming to be) too cozy with business or Government. Says Hearst Correspondent Pat Sloyan, a retiring board member: "It's the appearance of the thing. We're talking about a propaganda arm of the U.S. Government."

Other correspondents have appeared on VOA programs. Strout's defenders point out that the equipment and expenses of the press galleries are paid for by Congress, a situation that would seem to make the new rule an exercise in hairsplitting. Without his press card, Strout will be barred from the Capitol when the President is speaking and could in theory be prevented by Capitol guards from looking in on congressional committee hearings. But Strout does not think that will happen. After 51 years, he says, "I'm well known up there."

► The National News Council was established a year ago by the Twentieth Century Fund to investigate charges of unfair reporting. So far, it has had little to do. Main reason: the council has not come up with cases that fall within its ground rules. It thought it had finally found a solid issue in October when, during a televised press conference, President Nixon lashed out at the "outrageous, vicious, distorted reporting" on his Administration carried by the three TV networks (TIME, Nov. 12).

The nonprofit, nonpartisan council decided to look into Nixon's complaint. Discussions with Press Secretary Ron Ziegler and Ken Clawson, now director of White House communications, turned up six general areas of alleged TV bias, including coverage of the Christmas 1972 bombing of Hanoi and the "unfavorable" comments that accompanied news reports of Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox's ouster last October. The council dutifully assembled abstracts of network evening news shows and commentaries that touched on the six subjects and requested that Ziegler then tell it which of the approximately 200 specific segments the President considered "outrageous, vicious, distorted."

Last week the council announced that its investigation had been stymied by White House silence. Should detailed charges ever be forthcoming, the council will resume its inquiry. In the meantime, according to the council's executive director, William B. Arthur, "it would be difficult, if not futile, for the council to attempt to deduce from broad and nonspecific charges the particular actions of the television networks that inspired the President's remarks."



...that led to the win-  
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...moved to complain to  
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...ought to remain in-  
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...State Stimson in 1929,  
...read each other's mail,"  
...aying, he shut down the  
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### Modern Debate

...over the use of caves-  
... techniques in the ad-  
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...ndable, has produced a  
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...not its cogency. Indeed,  
...the wells of ink devoted to

## Digest

### and Exchange Commission

#### WASHINGTON

Montgomery & Co., Others.  
the Securities Exchange Act  
Montgomery & Co., Inc., JAB  
ers: Dixon, Dolce & Co., Inc.,  
guidation; Richard S. Fried-

th Fund and Rudolf Maurizi  
f New York; Stonehenge  
th Fund and Francis M.  
rak of Brielle, N. J.; and the  
Fund, The Elba Fund and  
M. Toal of New York.  
e proceedings are based upon  
ations of the Commission's  
that respondents made short  
tinued on page 3, column 1)

10 dealers who buy and sell estates  
New York Antiques Centre, 962  
d Avenue (between 57th and 58th  
ets); for information call (212)  
6010—Advt.

...a dirty business. The debate  
that followed, perhaps more than  
the debate that preceded the  
Court's decision, quickly acquired  
a stylized set of arguments, which  
soon cut off the possibility of any  
meaningful dialogue. Division, de-  
lay and deadlock were the result.

### The 1968 Act

Not until a series of events in  
1967 and 1968 was the resulting  
judicial and legislative log jam  
broken. A majority of the Presi-  
dent's Commission on Law En-  
forcement and Administration of  
(Continued on page 4, cols. 1 & 2)

## Fuld Is Named to Succeed Traynor As Head of National News Council

The National News Council an-  
nounced yesterday the resignation  
of Justice Roger J. Traynor as  
chairman and the election of Stan-  
ley H. Fuld, former Chief Judge  
of the State of New York, as his  
successor.

Justice Traynor, formerly Chief  
Justice of California, is relinquish-  
ing his post with the Council to  
accept the Arthur Goodhart Visi-  
ting Professorship of Legal Science  
at Cambridge University, England,  
for the academic year 1974-75. He  
will continue to aid the National  
News Council in an advisory ca-  
pacity.

The effective date of the change  
in Council leadership will be  
April 1.

### Purposes of Council

The National News Council, an  
independent organization funded  
by a number of foundations, was  
established last year to do two  
things: (1) examine complaints  
from the public concerning ac-  
curacy and fairness of news pre-  
sentations by national news ser-  
vices, network broadcasters and  
national publications; and (2) ex-  
amine possible infringements of  
constitutional guarantees of a free  
press.

The Council consists of fifteen

gress testify that they are winning  
battles and skirmishes which could  
lead to more important achieve-  
ments.

The process of whittling away the  
liberal guidelines of the court's de-  
cision is in a couple of laws en-  
acted and in amendments approved  
by one or both houses to a variety  
of bills that seem to be headed  
toward Congressional approval.

### Legal Assistance

Last week the Senate approved  
an amendment to the Legal Ser-  
vices Corporation Act, sponsored by  
Senator Dewey F. Bartlett, R-

or the mother, or  
individual or insti-  
an abortion. . . .

A similar amend-  
was approved by  
bill is now in confer-  
to resolve differences  
ments.

Already enacted  
amendment to the  
sponsored by Sena-  
R-N. C., which forb-  
foreign aid money f-  
a part of a family  
gram. Also enacted  
ment introduced by  
Margaret Heckler, R-  
insures that hospi-  
funds under the Hea-  
Act cannot be thr-  
withdrawal of funds  
to perform abortions

### Actions Pen

Also pending are:

- An amendment  
security bill offered  
James L. Buckley, R-  
would prohibit the us-  
funds for abortions.

- An amendment  
health services bill  
Senator Frank Chur-  
providing that hospita-

(Continued on page 4)

## Personal

Samuel C. Cantor  
pointed senior vice-  
the law and public at  
ments of Mutual of N-  
ward E. Blakeslee wil-  
Cantor as general cor-  
company.

John A. Geoghegan  
confidential law secre-  
mer State Supreme C-  
Elbert T. Gallagher, N-  
District, has become  
with Taylor & McCul-

James B. Swire and  
Gregorich, associates  
Hoge & Hills, are no  
of the firm.

John H. Byington,  
come a member of Win-  
son, Putnam & Rober-

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NY Law Journal  
2/14/74



The National News Council, set up last year to monitor press accuracy and fairness, will be headed by Stanley Fuld, retired chief judge of New York's highest court. The first chairman, Roger Traynor, also a former state chief judge, will accept a visiting professorship in England. The council has dropped its biggest project, a study of President Nixon's charges of bias in television network news, because it said the White House wouldn't cooperate.

\* \* \*

# Judge Fuld to Head National News Council

Judge Stanley H. Fuld, former chief judge of the State of New York, has been named chairman of the National News Council, effective April 1. The council was set up by the Twentieth-Century Fund to investigate public grievances about national news reporting.

Judge Fuld succeeds Justice Roger J. Traynor, former chief justice of the State of California, who resigned to accept a visiting professorship at Cambridge University. Justice Traynor will continue to serve the council as an adviser.

## National News Council's Chairman, Traynor, Resigns

By a WALL STREET JOURNAL Staff Reporter

NEW YORK—The National News Council, a foundation-sponsored monitor of press accuracy and fairness, said its chairman, Roger J. Traynor, has resigned to accept a visiting professorship of legal science at Cambridge University, England, for the 1974-75 academic year.

Mr. Traynor, 74-year-old former chief justice of the California Supreme Court, will be succeeded by Stanley H. Fuld, retired chief judge of the New York State Court of Appeals. Mr. Fuld is 70.

William Arthur, the council's executive director, said Mr. Traynor's resignation was based on purely personal considerations, and was unrelated to recent developments involving the council. Last month, the council announced that its largest undertaking since its creation last year—a study of White House charges of bias in network television news—couldn't be concluded because the White House wouldn't cooperate. Mr. Traynor's decision to resign was made prior to the termination of that study, Mr. Arthur said.

Mr. Fuld will become chairman April 1, the council said, while Mr. Traynor will continue with the council in an advisory capacity.

## Press Chief Resigns

New York

Roger J. Traynor, the chairman of the National News Council, an independent organization founded last year to investigate complaints about the media and to examine any infringements of the free press, has resigned to accept a visiting law professorship at Cambridge University in England.

The council said yesterday that Stanley H. Fuld, formerly chief judge of the State of New York, was elected to replace Traynor.

Associated Press





## Art Buchwald

### GOOD NEWS, BAD NEWS

#### WASHINGTON.

In his recent speech in Huntsville, Ala., on "Honor America Day" President Nixon said, "In the nation's capital there is a tendency for partisanship to take over from statesmanship. In the nation's capital sometimes there is a tendency in the reporting of the news—I do not say this critically, it's simply a fact of life—that bad news is news and good news is not news."

I couldn't agree with the President more.

But in fairness to the people reporting the news, the problem is not one of reporting bad news or good news but of knowing what is good news as opposed to bad news. When you work in Washington it's difficult to distinguish the difference, and what may sound like bad news to President Nixon is actually good news to somebody else.

\* \* \*

For example, there was a special election in Grand Rapids, Mich., for Vice President Ford's Congressional seat and for the first time in 64 years a Democrat won. Now this was obviously bad news for the President, but it was good news for the Democrats. Had the press not reported this, they wouldn't know if they were suppressing good news or bad news.

Another example of the cloudy issue of good news and bad news is former Vice President Agnew's Secret Service detail. When the press played up the fact that Mr. Agnew still had Secret Service protection and had taken a flock of them to Palm Springs to stay with Frank Sinatra, this was bad news for the Administration.

But when the stories forced the White House to take the Secret Service away from Mr. Agnew, this was good news for the American taxpayer. Had the press not printed the bad news, there would have never been any good news to follow up with. The Agnew case proved that the revelation of bad news can have a good effect.

Every day the Washington press corps wrestles with some great moral dilemma. Take the case of the Watergate tapes. When the President decided to turn over the nine tapes to the special prosecutor that was good news. But when he discovered that two of nine did not exist, that was bad news.

In this case the President had a right to be angry. Instead of talking about the seven he turned over to the special prosecutor, the press made an issue of the two that were missing. Then to complicate matters it was discovered that 18½ minutes of one tape had been erased.

This was bad news. But what the media failed to report was the good news which was that except for the 18½-minute gap, the rest of the tape was clear as a bell.

Even Administration officials have a hard time sorting out good news from bad news. Recently Roy Ash, the head of the Office of Management and Budget, said the energy crisis was only temporary and would soon be over.

This was good news, and for once the media revealed it. Then William Simon, the energy czar, spoke out and said Ash didn't know what the hell he was talking about and that the energy crisis would be with us for a long time to come. This was bad news, and it really hurt the press to reveal it so soon after Ash's good news.

\* \* \*

I think what the President was talking about was the Washington press corps' reluctance to print good news about him. A perfect illustration is that recent polls revealed that the American people held Congress in lower esteem than the President of the United States by five percentage points.

Unfortunately, though, the President at the time of the poll was held in high esteem by only 26 per cent of the people. So you could either say this was good news for the President or bad news for the country.

It would be most helpful for people in Washington if the government could set up guidelines for us so we could know what good news is. The Kremlin does this for the press in the Soviet Union and it works like a dream.